

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, DC 20554**

In the Matter of)	
Implementation of Section 621(a)(1) of)	
The Cable Communications Policy Act)	MB Docket No. 05-311
Of 1984 as Amended by the Cable)	
Television Consumer Protection and)	
Competition Act of 1992)	

COMMENTS OF THE CALIFORNIA FARMERS UNION

The California Farmers Union is writing in response to the Federal Communication Commission's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, and we are pleased to offer comments in favor of allowing consumers the opportunity to have lower cable costs by creating a more competitive cable market.

The California Farmers Union is the 24th state chapter of the National Farmers Union, which is a general farm organization representing nearly 300,000 family farmers and ranchers nationwide. Farmers Union serves its membership by presenting the organization's policies to lawmakers at the local, state and national level. Farmers Union also serves its membership by assisting with education and by providing stimulus and know-how for farmer-owned cooperatives. National Farmers Union is a federation that has been in existence since 1902. The presidents of the 26 state and regional Farmers Union Organizations comprise its board of directors. The California Farmers Union is also a member of Consumers for Cable Choice (C4CC) which is an alliance of approximately 40 consumer groups, numbering more than 1 million members.

For many years, it has been a slow and difficult process for rural Americans to have access to cable television services. Once available in some rural areas, there has been only one provider of the service over a period of several years. Currently, there is an opportunity for the Federal Communications Commission to change this situation, and we would like to be on record in support of that change.

The current cable television market has become outdated and therefore, restrictive to consumers. In many cable markets, there is only one cable

provider, which makes competitive pricing impossible for consumers to find. This monopolistic arrangement is perpetuated by the local franchising process, which acts as a stumbling block to new entrants. As a result, cable rates have risen by more than 56% since 1996.

Current, outmoded franchise regulations prevent more cable television providers from entering market areas, and give consumers the benefit of competitive pricing. We believe the Federal Communications Commission has the authority to level the field for all competitive entrants to the cable market, and prevent the demands of unnecessary and unfair obligations that exist today. In addition, we believe that expanding competition may allow two goals to be realized: improved cable television services, as well as added benefits from newer communications technologies.

At the time franchising rules were created, competitive cable television was only a dream in comparison to now, when there are several different means of providing cable services to the home or the business. It was the FCC that created limited parameters for the local franchising authorities (LFA).

We support any efforts on the part of the Commission to limit local franchising authorities from preventing new competitive entrants into the cable or video markets. It is consumers who should have the ability to choose which cable options work best for them. It should not be the local franchising process which determines available consumer choices.

We do suggest that the Commission has the authority and the obligation to ensure that franchise fees are levied equally among all cable providers incumbents, as well as new entrants. In addition, we recommend that the Commission ensure that a fair and equitable process is developed at the local level that would allow a scheduled time allotment at which point negotiations prolonged for a certain amount of time would be moved to the state level.

We believe that cable and video competition, and any accompanying technological advances in communication would yield potential benefits in entertainment, business and personal communications for the members of our organization. It is the arcane regulations of the local franchising authority that prevent our members from enjoying the benefits of a competitive cable market.

We encourage the FCC, which holds the ability to vastly improve the quality of life in rural as well as urban areas by uniformly regulating the local franchising authorities into a fair and equitable franchising system, to do so with all deliberate speed.

Respectfully submitted,

Joaquin Contente, President
California Farmers Union

February 7, 2006